HEZEKIAH'S WIVES

LILLIE·HAMILTON·FRENCH

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"IT IS A CORNER FILLED ALL DAY WITH SUNSHINE" (page 2)

HEZEKIAH'S WIVES

BY

LILLIE HAMILTON FRENCH

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1902

TO THE MOTHER

OF

THE LITTLE BISHOP

PREFACE — TO BE READ LAST

ISABELLA always says — Isabella is my colored maid — Isabella always says that Hezekiah never seemed like a bird at all, but a person. And Isabella, I think, was right. He was a person, yellow canary as he was, — a person of distinction and charm, of never failing brightness and beauty, of generous moods and irresistible songs, — a person, indeed, and one of the best beloved members of my family.

He came to me some five years since in the way I have already described. A young English girl, suddenly called out of the country, had appealed to me for protection for her bird, a bird newly purchased but already endeared to her.

I had declined at first to receive him, for I had never cared for canaries, and my feeling had always been against the keeping of imprisoned animals — creatures loving freedom yet put behind bars for our delectation. My English friend was so insistent, however, and Isabella was so eager to accept all the care of the canary (a care which she has never shirked even when my bird families increased), that I received Hezekiah in my home — never to regret it afterward, and only to remember it now as one of the keenest pleasures in my life. For like a well-bred guest, he adapted himself at once to my manner of living, entertaining me and contributing to my amusement, but never requiring even a window to be shut on his account.

Of course the two corner windows back of the rubber-tree were kept closed, but there were two other windows and three doors in the room. These were always

open, to say nothing of those in adjoining rooms. None of these tempted him. Sometimes when he wanted to see what I was doing in my study he would dart in, surprise me with a burst of song, a tip of his little head at me, and a sudden departure out again. This habit grew upon him with the years as our intimacy increased, but for the most part he preferred his rubber-tree, the sunshine, and the plaster cast of the singing boy.

Everything that I have told of him, of Little Miss Goosey, that enchanting bird, of Rebecca, and all the rest, happened just as I have described it. I am careful to make this statement because I have been asked so often whether I really ever knew a bird like Hezekiah. As if I had not only known him but loved him, and as if any one, I do not care who, could possibly have imagined a bird so delightful as he. Had I wanted to expound

theories, I might have studied the habits of stuffed canaries, but my birds were real, and were always doing unexpected things to prove themselves the characters that they were. Then, too, I knew nothing of canaries when Hezekiah came. I supposed them all alike. That the nature of one should differ from that of another, that there should be affinities among them, that one bird could have loved as hopelessly as Little Miss Goosey and be as cherished as Rebecca, surprised me as much as my story may surprise some readers. I might have known all this, however, having been familiar with marked differences among chickens. Then again, it seemed to me, even as I was telling that story, that its only value, and the only value of any story of its kind, must lie in an absolute fidelity to facts as they are, and not as a writer imagines them.

I doubt whether many persons, even

those who have always had canaries in the house, are much better informed about their natures than I was, since the custom is to keep canaries caged, and so to miss all knowledge of their personalities, and all the beauty of their songs, except of that one song known as the song of the canary, which in reality is only the song of their captivity — never the song to which I refer when speaking of Hezekiah's. Give a canary his freedom, and you will hear a different note. Give him companionship, and you will hear a dozen others. Like the rooster, he has a nesting-note. He has too a note of courtship, one of anger, of fear, of pain, and one of general delight. He has a particular note by which he makes his needs known. When Hezekiah wanted anything he used this last note. So did Little Miss Goosey. Rebecca's wants being always satisfied, she never required it! Sometimes Hezekiah would want his cage door open, or

to tell me that his seeds were out, or that his cracker had fallen. Sometimes he only wanted to sing to me. For when I came up to him, having heard him call from another room and gone in to see, as I always did, what he wanted, he would only stand and sing to me, looking down in my face, for the pleasure of hearing me praise him, perhaps, or for the pleasure of seeing me pleased, who knows? All that I know is that, the song over, he would dart off again. Then there was a little note, one single note, round as a pearl, it seemed to me, with which he answered me and which he used for no one else. None or any of these were the notes he used when singing with Rebecca, or when singing alone at those times when singing was for the joy of the song. Then there was but a slight lifting of the head-feathers, no distortion of the neck, but a quiet pose and an hour or more of pure melody.

PREFACE

Casual visitors seldom hear this song from a canary. The room must be quiet. Then again canaries, like dogs or other household pets, get excited when strangers arrive. Their trills and peeps are nothing more than evidences of it.

All birds know their own names and make no mistakes about them. They know their own cages and will always go into them. Hunger if nothing else will drive them in.

I have found them the most charming of companions. Their wants are few. They never have to be exercised. They are excellent, too, for people inclined to fluctuations of feeling, for whatever your mood may be, when you speak to a canary, you must use a cheerful tone.

LILLIE HAMILTON FRENCH.

March, 1902.

HEZEKIAH'S WIVES

I

IT appears to be a law of life that those things against which we rail too violently are those which the inexorable working of some principle compels us to turn about and meet. Therefore it followed, of necessity, since I had declared against the sin of keeping birds in a house, and especially against the folly of canaries, that I should find myself some day forced to confess the ownership of one — a small yellow canary, in this instance, who, already known as Hezekiah, was sent me by an English girl suddenly called out of the country.

On the morning after his arrival I opened the door of his cage, and the cheeriest corner of my parlor was made over to him.

It is a corner filled all day with sunshine pouring through two windows at right angles to each other, and furnished with broad, old-fashioned sills. One window is to the east and the other to the south. Between them there had stood for years a rubber-tree, now grown, with tender nursing, to the size of an ordinary lilac-bush, its branches stretching wide like welcoming arms, until their fingers of glistening leaves press against the panes on either side. Back of this tree, and in the angle between the two windows, a long, narrow mirror runs from the floor to a level with the upper casing. On top of this mirror, and well out of the way of a careless touch, there is a small plaster cast of a singing boy with book out-

spread before him, his chubby hand extended, and his finger held up to mark the time.

This corner, then, with its several appointments, has for some years constituted all of Hezekiah's world. The rubber-tree has been to him a forest of delight, and the shadow of the singing boy, like a shrine by the wayside, has sheltered him when he took his noonday rest. His inclinations have bound him there, not my volition. Now and then, in the early days of our acquaintance, a book-shelf or a picture in some other part of the room would tempt him for a moment, but never an open door, though my doors and windows have been left open all day without regard to him. He has never been happy in any other place. When it became necessary to shut him up and carry him into an adjoining room that this one might be swept, he has waked me at

dawn, begging to be carried back, and not ceasing to call until he was on his tree again. I used to wish, at times, that I did not understand the language of birds so well. It is astonishing how quickly a knowledge of it comes.

It was delightful to watch him as he flitted from branch to branch, taking up on his yellow breast, as he moved, the green shadow of the leaves, or, perched upon some twig, shining for a moment in the sunlight like gold. And how he reveled in the melodies he made! His voice was not like that of a canary, but rather like that of some rare bird of the forest. And oftenest it was as if two were singing, he changed his keys so rapidly, interrupting himself, breaking in upon his own rippling cadences, clear in tone as those of a flute, with long-drawn-out strains of a surpassing sweetness, as though echoes of undreamed harmonies haunted him.

Though he would permit no hand to be placed upon him, he showed no fear at any one's close approach. We all talked to him, every guest who came, and he would stand still on a branch of the rubber-tree, tipping his head and cocking his tiny feathery ears to be sure he missed no word. His air of valor won him much applause and my affection. He was like a soldier on parade, so valiant and intrepid in repose, the feathers on his head puffing when you flattered him, till he seemed in reality to be wearing a helmet with plumes. When I asked him to sing for us, he would swell his little throat, almost bursting it in his eagerness to please, while he turned his head from one face to another of those who were listening, his sharp eyes shining with the joy of his success. He was so debonair and so delightful, so full of the feeling of the forest, that the idea of his being,

after all, only a prisoner in my parlor used to be a pain. All of man's original sin to animals haunted me.

But what was there to do? Every other house held its prisoner like mine. Outside my windows, too, there were only miles and miles of asphalt and cobblestones. The first tree was a poor apology, and a block away. The sparrows who lived on it would have demolished him.

It was when thinking of all these things that I determined to buy him a mate.

I carried her home with great glee, and the feelings of a philanthropist who expects an Arcadia to follow quick upon his reforms. Each of us likes to feel himself a special providence. I was glad I could be one to Hezekiah.

The bird-fancier told me to leave the new bird shut up for several days,

until she and Hezekiah became accustomed to each other; but being impatient to bestow a happiness which I was sure would follow, I let her out at once. It was her first taste of freedom, and she took some moments to adjust herself, trying different twigs and leaves. Hezekiah, meantime, had flown to the top of the mirror, where he sat, his head tipped on one side, looking down at her. She evidently made no appeal to his imagination. He had often watched me in the same way when I was watering the rubber-tree, his head first on one side, then on the other, his tiny beads of black eyes alternately coming into service.

I had expected different things from this valiant little fellow: that he would show her the way to the seed-dish, to the bath of cold water always waiting under his rubber-tree; that he would conduct himself with some of the gal-

lantry of a barnyard rooster, at least, who busies himself at once with the entertainment of any new hen, scratching the earth fiercely for her in chivalrous quest of a worm, or leading her with courtly cluck through the pleasure-places of his domain. For the first time he disappointed me.

The new bird's confidence increased with every venture among the leaves, though she remained oblivious of any other presence in the room. Hezekiah's interest in her slowly grew. Finally, with a low note, he flew down and took a place beside her. Now, at last, my little soldier meant to prove himself. And how radiant and beautiful he was, his yellow plumes all a-glimmer in the sunshine !

I was called away just then, and some hours elapsed before my return. They were both, by that time, in one cage — he a heap of disordered feathers, hud-

dled up in a corner against the bars ; she an angry fury with wings outspread, and darting at him hideous blows with beak and claws.

I rescued him, of course, and so saved his life. But when he was put back on his perch, he proved himself man enough to look as though nothing had happened, straightening himself, smoothing out his feathers, moving rapidly about with the air of one who was saying : " It was not as bad as you thought. I could have got away if I had only chosen to strike back."

When the spectacle of his discomfiture had been repeated on several succeeding days, always followed after Hezekiah's rescue by that sudden straightening of the body and that assumption of an easy and dégagé air, I determined to give the new bird away. Her affinity was evidently elsewhere, for she mated at once with my neigh-

bor's bird, bore him five eggs, and is to this day living in unruffled domestic serenity with him. I related my experience to sympathizing friends, and learned that it was not unusual. One person told me of her own canary, who, after having raised several sets of fledgelings for her mate, suddenly grew tired of him, and made their life a misery by her quarrels. Brought into contact with another bird, she went over to him, living in quiet contentment, happy in the families they reared until death took her off. I heard, too, of an invalid who, wishing to make the tame bird that flew about his pillow happy, presented him with a mate. After the first encounter nothing was left of the pet bird but a few feathers.

These stories alarmed me, and I determined to let Hezekiah alone. For nearly a year, then, he lived by himself on his rubber-tree, and became again,

now that his dignity was restored, the delightful bird of our early acquaintance, blithe and beautiful and gay, a very prince among canaries, and making his corner of my parlor a bower of delight.

When the spring came and the winds were soft, and every man felt the promise of something in the air, I used to find him sitting quietly on the broad window-sill, looking up at the blue of the sky, or out at the sparrows flying past, each on its own special quest. Once I came upon him talking to one of these birds who had alighted on the outside sill, and who was chirping to him through the window-panes. On my approach the strange bird flew away, but Hezekiah sat there. There was much pathos to me in his lonely little figure, in the idea of his being shut up indoors, missing all the joy of that world lying just beyond his reach

— a world of sweet ties and joint duties, of always going two by two.

Next morning I bought Hezekiah a second mate.

At this point in my story I lay down my pen in despair. So engaging a little creature as this second wife is not easy to portray. How can I, indeed, ever hope to do justice to a cleverness which distinguished her every charming act, enabling her, a bird born and bred in captivity, to fly about the room on her first venture? In what way can I rightly describe an intelligence which led her to investigate every part of my parlor and its adjoining rooms before two days had passed, simply because she felt she must know what her surroundings were like? And where are the words to do justice to that acumen by which she divined at once that when I approached her cage it was presumably to shut her in, and that, therefore,

she must be up and out like a flash, whatever she was doing, the moment I appeared at the parlor door? Hezekiah had never guessed it. I could walk up to his cage and shut him in whenever I chose, and always to his intense surprise. But I had to bewilder her with lights, or by a white towel held in front of my advancing figure, before I could get near enough to hers to shut her in.

Then there was her keenness of perception, enabling her to discover a fact of which Hezekiah, in all the other time, had never dreamed—the fact of my keeping their hemp-seed hidden in a glass loving-cup on the table; and that fact established, a way by which, when I was not at home, she could get off its cover and help herself. Then, supreme excellence of all, there was her surpassing affection for her mate. For she was undeniably and hopelessly in love

with Hezekiah, and was so from the first. I have seen her sit for half an hour at a time cuddled up close to him on top of the mirror, wings touching, just under the shadow of the plaster singing boy — he all golden yellow, she a bronze green, and her mouth wide open and held up toward him, begging for a kiss in the low notes which birds use in their courtship.

Once in a while Hezekiah would turn and give her a little peck on her bill, but it was always in bored, perfunctory fashion, and only to resume afterward his attitude of indifference, ignoring the little figure beside him, the open bill still held up to him, and the pleading voice.

For Hezekiah, indeed, returned none of her affection. When she first came, he fought her on several occasions, but not fiercely — more to establish himself in his rightful place than for any other

reason. He knew what it led to when females got the upper hand. His first experience was still fresh in his mind. He began, therefore, by introducing a system of vicarious discipline, trying it first on the small bird, who knew nothing of his former discomfiture. The very universality of the method made it easy for him. After that he let the new arrival alone, and went about singing on his rubber-tree. But she, like most people hopelessly in love, lacked a fine discretion. When he did not seek her she sought him, always so enchanted by the beauty of the song that had bewitched her that she joined in and spoiled it. This was her greatest mistake, for her voice was bad, and sounded, as she "peeped," like the dismal creaking of a rusty blind. Hezekiah hated it, for it jarred upon an ear already attuned to the finer cadences of his own rare tones. Yet this poor little second

wife was so bewitched by his singing, as we all were, that she could never control herself when he began.

Day after day the same scene was repeated between them. He on the rubber-tree would wait until he saw her in her cage busy with a seed, and then, thinking her too occupied to hear, he would swell his throat in song. At its very first flourish, up would go her head and down her seed. Like a flash she was out of her cage and over on the tree beside him, uttering, in an ecstasy, a cry of delight. Alas! no caw of a crow could have been harsher. It maddened Hezekiah and ended his song, sending him in a fury to the top of the mirror. But she, like one whom some ideal has escaped, still pursued him. He, just as she reached him, would fly higher and light on the singing boy's head. She would seek the tip of the singing boy's finger. Then down in disgust he would

dart into his own cage, like a man out of humor who slams a door after him. But she, with a joyous flutter of wings, would go in too, so as to do just what he did, eat seeds or drink water, she did not care which, only it must be something he was doing, and after that he must kiss her. For she always held her little open bill up to him. This prince among singers was her very own, and she loved him.

I have watched them scores of times; it was always the same story: Hezekiah beginning to sing, and Little Miss Goosey interrupting him — for I called her so, using the pet name of a small niece whom she resembled in her character.

The peace and contentment of Hezekiah's life were gone. He used to look reproachfully at me, never tipping his head to listen, nor cocking his feathery ears, nor puffing the plumes on his

head. When I asked him to sing he refused. He knew too well what would follow should Little Miss Goosey hear him. He took to staying out at night for the first time in his life — sleeping on top of the mirror, leaving Little Miss Goosey, since she insisted on respecting the sentiments, to enjoy his perch by herself. Nothing ever tempted him into *her* cage, but she was always going to his, eating his seed and his apple and his cracker. I recognized only too clearly now what my officious kindness had done. Yet little Miss Goosey was so engaging and so clever I could not send her away. Besides, she loved Hezekiah, and how was I to deny her the scant happiness of her proximity to him ? I let her stay.

One Sunday afternoon, when the house was quiet, I chanced to look up from my book, and discovered her perched on the edge of the globe be-

longing to the gas-jet. In her mouth she held a piece of moss. She had taken it from the rubber-tree. It told me in a flash all her story. Everything that lies in a woman's heart when such revelations are made went out from mine to her, bird only though she was. I wanted to go to her and help her, — it was all so new to her, — but no one but another bird like herself could have been of service to her at this time. Hezekiah paid her no attention, letting her find things out for herself, never guessing them, perhaps, and only too glad to have her occupied at last. I almost hated him.

Little Miss Goosey, balancing herself, leaned over and put the moss in the gas-globe, straightening herself with surprise when she saw it fall through to the floor. Yet it was the only thing she had seen in the room high up and shaped like a nest. She was clearly be-

wildered. She went about the room, tugging with all her tiny might at pieces of wool on the divan-cover ; picking up bits of string ; going into the wood-box, among the sofa-cushions, behind the curtains on the window-sill ; in and out, up and down, all alone, till darkness came. Did she even know what to tell Hezekiah ? I laid aside my book. Strange thoughts came to me as I watched her blind obedience to a law she did not understand, yet which was as surely leading her on to the accomplishment of her own destiny. What were we as a race missing, I said, because of our pride in reasoning away those things which we do not understand, — even those things which press us as heavily as instinct was pressing on that little bird ?

Early on Monday morning I brought home a new cage with a nest in it, shutting Little Miss Goosey and Hezekiah

in. How angry she was ! What fire darted at me out of her tiny eyes ! Something told her I was no authority on nests — that they belonged somewhere out in the open, and not behind bars. She flattened the feathers on top of her head every time I approached her. She built herself a sort of screen out of the cotton, so that I need not pry upon her. She misunderstood me entirely, for I gave my parlor up to her for weeks when her eggs came, sitting somewhere else in discomfort so as not to disturb her with a light.

Even Hezekiah's manner toward me changed. He who had been my close companion and my friend for years now opened his mouth and hissed at me when I came too near, sliding along his perch, as he did so, till he stood a fierce protector close beside the nest. Nothing tempted him away from his post, until with a little cry she would rise from her

nest for a hurried bite, then back again before you could count ten.

Sometimes, however, he would rouse himself quickly, as if a sudden thought had come to him in the stillness, and leaning tenderly over her nest, he would kiss her several times, while he uttered gentle and encouraging tones. I have seen him do this many times. For the rest he was as silent as an owl in the daylight, his wings hunched up about his head, his eyes dull and dim with long watching. I used to think him the very type and excellence of protective devotion, until I found him sound asleep at night, puffed up on his perch like a little yellow ball, his head under one wing, one foot drawn up under the other.

But I never caught Little Miss Goosey napping. That eternal vigilance ruling in motherhood permitted no sleep for her. Her glistening eyes

were always alert, and when I looked at her by candle-light I was almost startled at first, she was so like a snake lying across that nest with her shining eyes, her flat head, and her feathers smooth in anger at my approach. Hezekiah never used to hear me. Night was his time for sleep.

I used to feel a certain sorrow that Little Miss Goosey understood me so badly, but I used to laugh at Hezekiah. He found it so easy to be valiant in the sunshine, but when the night came he yielded himself, as we all must, to a higher watchfulness.

When in a fortnight the little birds came, there were two. The pure pride of paternity filled Hezekiah's heart. The male bird in captivity is apt to destroy his young and has to be separated from them. But not Hezekiah. He was all devotion, anxiety, and delight, and full of business and affairs. He was

no longer my Hezekiah, to be sure. Not a vestige was left of that gay and blithesome creature who had filled my room with color and song. A noble and self-sacrificing father had taken his place, who paid no more attention to me, his old comrade, except with the hiss to which I have referred, now fiercer than ever since with his own eyes he had beheld the wonder of his little ones.

The story of these little ones has no place here, though I wish that I might tell how they grew rapidly like flowers, — in less than three weeks they were as big as their parents and flying about the room, — how clever and tame and pretty they were, and how they behaved when they caught their first glimpse of the sky, standing still for full five minutes and looking up — long enough for me to go into another room and call some one to come and see them. They

might miss it all their lives to come, but they knew their rightful place when they saw it.

When they were grown and the summer had come, I had to go out of town, and I gave them away, and sent the parent birds to a fancier to be cared for. But after three months, when I returned, Hezekiah recognized my voice, and, the cares of paternity no longer oppressing him, he burst into a song of welcome, to the amazement of all the men in the store. I did not love Little Miss Goosey then as much as I learned to afterward, and I confess with shame that I hardly greeted her. I had not quite recovered from the shock of her disliking me, who had only tried to help her with her little ones.

As Hezekiah was moulting, he had to be shut up on his return. Little Miss Goosey refused to be. Once she worked her way through the bars that had been

wedged apart, but generally, though she forced her head and neck through, the instinctive impulse to lift her wings held her in. She had much on her mind, it was easy to see — important affairs to attend to. She did not mean to have her next nest behind bars, nor my supplying her with things she did not want. So she was up and at work early, to be ready against time, — she knew now what had to be, — calling and scolding me when I was slow about opening her door.

She chose the top of the mirror this time, carrying up there bits of string and moss that I had left about the rubber-tree, and sometimes tugging so hard for more at the thread of yellow silk in the curtain close by that she fell over backward. The beginnings of her nest are still there. She was full of busy importance, and between times more in love than ever with her Hezekiah, going

down with her wings all a-flutter, the begging note in her voice, to kiss him through the bars. Sometimes, by way of return, he would put his bill up to kiss her: he was rather kind to her then — he was sick and could not sing.

It was at this time that I learned how sensitive Little Miss Goosey was. I scolded her one day, — the more shame mine, — told her she was tiresome and troublesome, always begging to get out. Every feather on her body fell suddenly, till she was as slender and as smooth as a finger. When, to atone, and because I was abashed before her, I praised her, calling her a pretty bird, and "so good, so good, *such* a good little bird," her feathers were up again in delight, till those on her head nearly stood straight. It was then that I really began to love her. When I realized that this little bird had feelings to hurt, as quick as my own, somehow she grew

to be a personality to me. She began to love me, too, and would often fly about after me, understanding all the fun of my laughing at her.

Dear Little Miss Goosey! I shall never see another bird to equal her. Her only fault lay in her great and sore affliction — harsh measure of fate, which gave her a voice that rasped all who heard it, and allied her to a mate who knew what sweet singing ought to be. Her death was untimely. The colored woman who washes for me told me mysteriously that she knew it was coming, because she "saw signs." I was at luncheon, the windows wide open. Suddenly Little Miss Goosey, who was never allowed there, — unlike Hezekiah, she would try to come, — flew into the dining-room, made a circle around my head, and was out again in a flash. I went to the parlor to see what was the matter, but she was only kissing Heze-

kiah through the bars. Ten minutes afterward, haunted by a strange sense of something, I went to look for her, wondering if possibly she could have gone out the window. I searched everywhere, for she never answered me as Hezekiah did, and I would have given up, or thought her hiding, as she loved to, but for the memory of that strange circle about my head.

After hunting everywhere, I got down at last on the floor, lifted the linen cover of the sofa, — it was still summer, — and looked under. Little Miss Goosey was there, but she was dead. She had wanted to see what it was I had put in the mouse-trap, — one of her hemp-seeds, for all she knew, — and the trap had snapped on her.

I rolled the little creature up with all tenderness, for she had grown to be my friend; and when night came and ten o'clock had struck, I took Hezekiah out

of the room and buried her down deep in the pot that held the rubber-tree.

I could not give that little body that had gladdened me to the ashman, nor leave it to the accidents of a neighbor's yard — strange exigencies of a city life, that permit of no sentiments but those that are entered on official records. I made her grave there, where I am sure, had I been in her place, I should have liked to have it, in the sunlight, under the tree where she had lived with the one she loved.

Although Hezekiah had never really cared for her, he missed her companionship, I suppose. He called her for days, afflicting me so sorely that I went out and for the third time bought him a mate — a tall, slender creature, a cross between an Austrian and a Belgian, which gave her her slim legs and long neck, and that air of high breeding and languor which always distinguished her.

She was a timid, gentle creature, too, with no will of her own, content to sit and look at you or anything by the hour. Her few notes were sweet, though she seldom uttered them.

Hezekiah, I say it with regret, fell in love with her at once. He may only have been glad to have the silence of those dreadful days broken at last, or he may have found the only bird he could really love. At any rate, my room became, all at once, like an orchard in June. Such music, such song, such rare melodies! Hezekiah tried a dozen notes and played upon them all, tossed them about and caught them up again, flung them at her; then played with them, rolling them over in his exquisite throat with all the abandon of overmastering joy, and all this, too, when he was moulting and no bird is expected to sing. She to whom the rhapsodies were poured would stand in rapt atten-

tion, never interrupting him like poor Little Miss Goosey. Poor Little Miss Goosey, indeed, down there underneath him deep in her grave!

I tried letting the new bird out, but she trembled and shook in terror, opening her mouth in awful fright, and panting. She had all the horror of one looking over a precipice when she stood on a leaf and saw the floor under her, an awful abyss below, instead of her cage. Some trick played by man with her pedigree had robbed her of her instinct for flight, and I had to shut her up again.

Hezekiah also preferred being shut up in his cage, even after his moulting was over. Since the day on which Little Miss Goosey died until now, seven months after, he who used to beg to get out, waking me at dawn to set him free, has never, of his free will, left his cage, nor stayed out when I thrust him. I

leave his cage open for days, and he will not stir. Nothing will induce him to sit any more on his rubber-tree, that forest of his early pleasures, and in the shadow of the leaves of which he had dallied to his heart's content. It is almost as though he knew who lay there underneath.

Sometimes, when I drive him out of his cage, he will settle on that of his new wife, going inside when the door is opened, and resting or singing beside her, but making no other advances. He likes the comfort of a warm, living presence, and is content with that.

She is too timid to kiss him, and their intimacy has ended where it began. When she is carried into another room he will peep for her, a note he never uttered until she came, which leads me to suppose this conventional cry merely a manner of exchanging signals, a sort of "All's well" and "Who goes

there?" among birds. He never used it for Little Miss Goosey, fearing she would answer him!

I have reproached myself many times, knowing how I have changed Hezekiah's life and impoverished my own. His gay life on the rubber-tree is over, and the carol of his triumphant notes from up beside the singing boy is heard no more. All his pretty ways are lost to me since I began to regulate his life and prove my own inappreciation of a rare singer's needs. And yet, even as I write, still reproaching myself, I look up from my desk at the two gilt cages hanging now by the rubber-tree.

Yes, he sings as beautifully as of old, though behind bars closed upon him by his own volition and because liberty brought him too much pain. He seems, too, as happy as in the other days. His third wife sits not far away, a silent, passive, and attentive mate, ready to

listen all day. Having no enthusiasm even in her affections, she commits none of its indiscretions, nor ever jars upon the singer with an uncongenial note.

Undoubtedly they are both content, he to sing and she to listen. It is the secret of much happiness in this world.

II

CAN any one's story be told until it is done ?

We detach odd moments from a sum of days as we pluck blossoms from a vine, but even as we think that we have grasped both the beginning and the end, the life of the whole, which is the growth of the whole, goes on, bringing with it the changes that growth entails.

Or we stem with idle fingers the current of some stream. The rippling of the little eddies breaking against our hands fixes itself in our memories as a melody which by and by we call the Song of the Brook. But of what the brook's next note will be when its currents reach some new impeding circum-

stance, we have not thought. And yet the brook flows on.

Or again the curtain falls on a last act, leaving the hero with uplifted sword. We go home carrying the picture with us, never dreaming that there can be another moment in his life when the arm is lowered, the sword sheathed, and the hero confronted with the commonplace.

I, at least, was not prepared for any other picture in Hezekiah's life than that with which the story of his early days was closed. He had attained then, with his third wife Rebecca, so it seemed to me, the great desideratum in a singer's life — a mate content to listen in enraptured silence whenever he chose to sing. This one never replied to his lyrical outbursts at all during the early months of their acquaintance except with a few shy notes, but they were notes so full of a ravishing charm, so

permeated by a certain haunting loveliness, that simply to hear them meant for Hezekiah an inspiration to still more impassioned melodies of his own. No wonder he was happy.

With such a consummation to his days, I, who knew what he had suffered in attaining, supposed of course his story told. But who is there of us who can tell which way the currents will swerve in any canary's character?

Hezekiah had been so glad to let the energetic wife who loved *him* find out things for herself, paying to the full as she had to, poor little bird, the penalty universally exacted of all ardor. How was I to know what he would do when confronted by the languor or timidity of the wife whom *he* loved, or that the gay and debonair singer would then be as guide and husband in one?

It all began at any rate in the spring, some nine months after Little Miss

Goosey's death. The new shoots of the rubber-tree were by that time as rosy as sprigs of red coral, and the sun that shone in through the corner windows by which the two gilt cages were hung was so bright, that it set even the sparrows up and down the cobblestoned street twittering gayly over their nests before the rest of the world was awake.

Something in the stir and gladness of it all filtered a way into Hezekiah's veins. He became less and less content to have Rebecca remain so languid and unmoved, now, when even the pigeons on the opposite roofs were frolicsome and gay. He wanted her to be up and out in the sunshine with him, reveling, as he loved to revel, in the freedom of the rubber-tree. He did everything to persuade her off her perch. I had long since given up trying. She had only opened her mouth and gasped with fright when I had driven her out of

the cage and on to the tree, where she would stand with beating heart (I could have counted the throbs), anguished with fright.

Hezekiah went about his lessons in a different way. No mother-bird could have been more careful; no cavalier more gallant. He put such sweetness into his service, such gayety, such abandon, such charm, that he made it all seem like the wildest of his holidays. Yet it took him days of devotion to persuade her as far as the door of her cage, and days more to get her over to a twig of the rubber-tree; and it was the work of a week to entice her to the rim of the pot in which the rubber-tree grew, and I dare not say how long it was before she could be induced to follow him up to the top of the mirror to rest beside the plaster singing boy.

And through it all his song never failed him nor his joyous caroling.

With every one of her successful ventures, he would swell his little throat, bursting into song, darting back and forth and making whirls about the ceiling, as if he were calling all the world to witness her accomplishment. And the more fuss she made at some jumping-off place, hesitating and pretending, with rapid twitches of her tail as she called to him in little half-frightened peeps, that she was much too nervous and too startled even to *try*, — the more tender and encouraging and excited he became, darting up to her with his gayest notes, then off to a near-by twig, to show her that not only was it quite the easiest thing in the world, but when you had learned it, altogether the most joyful and entrancing.

Then of course she must sing with him, her ravishing notes having been made to accompany his own! His habit was to teach her in the afternoon,

making her understand what real singing should be, — not caroling, which any bird can do instinctively. In a long-drawn-out note full of a surpassing sweetness, he would give her the key, he standing in his cage, she in hers, for there could be no dallying then, no distractions, when singing was for the sake of the song. When she lost it, he would give her the key again and again, taking up her notes and singing with them, then going off into roulades and adagios of his own (never in high notes or trills), returning again to her accompaniment, until I could hardly distinguish one voice from the other, so perfectly were they pitched in unison.

He, Hezekiah, would do all this, he who used to flee in despair whenever his other wife uttered a note. But then Hezekiah understands what sweet singing ought to be.

When it grew warmer, he taught her

how to bathe. This was a fearful pleasure to her at first, for she knew nothing of water except as she had seen it at the bird-fancier's, in a drinking-cup hung on the side of her cage. She could dip her head in one of these cups as any other store-bird could do, scattering a few drops over the wings — a mere apology for a bath, like a shower in some public charity building. Hezekiah would have none of that any more for the mate whom he loved. She must know all that he did, and what the joy of a real plunge could be, in water inches deep and sparkling in the sunshine. To show her how, particularly how to get the feet in first, he had to take a dozen dips a day in the saucer always filled under the rubber-tree. It was the agony of putting her feet in that bothered Rebecca. She wanted to wet her head only, as she had always done before. Then, once in the water, Hezekiah had

to show her how to bend those slim and awkward legs of hers, — they were always like stilts, — how to puff out her feathers, getting the water underneath, and then how to shake her tail feathers and plume her wings and rub her bill and dry herself in the sunshine.

When she had learned how to wet every one of her feathers and could come out dripping wet, Hezekiah would go off by himself and sit on the curtain rod, singing from pure pride of it, though I thought her hideous enough at the time, — like some chicken caught out in a thunder-shower. His being in love with Rebecca made such a difference.

Of course Rebecca enjoyed it all, and why not? having some one always on the alert for her pleasures, and better still, some one always on the alert for her fears — a prince among singers dropping everything to multiply his caresses and devotions whenever she

had one of her nervous alarms. I used to think, as I watched them from my chair, — he all tenderness and she all tremor and fright, — that she made but scant effort to help herself, finding, as she did, dependence so delightful for *her* and such an inspiration for *him*. I might only have been prejudiced, for I have always been skeptical about the timidity of the languid. Rebecca, too, was forever calling such loud attention to herself, especially when Hezekiah was about. Perhaps I might only have been thinking of Little Miss Goosey buried there under the rubber-tree over which they both were flitting so gayly. When was Hezekiah ever really tender to her, though she loved him to distraction? Poor, foolish Little Miss Goosey, indeed, never wise enough to understand the folly of self-reliance in all conjugal affairs.

Hezekiah might have forgotten, but

I never would, that Sunday afternoon only a twelve-month before, when he had let Little Miss Goosey go up and down the room alone trying to find a nesting-place, while he, indifferent, sat on his perch and ate seed. It was altogether different now. In his own bill he carried the strings for *this* one. He knew just what mother-birds needed. Had he not seen Little Miss Goosey make all her own preparations? So without a hint from Rebecca he even carried the moss from the rubber-tree, the bits of white cotton that I put out for them, calling to her all the while in the low sweet nesting-notes which even roosters use at this time, but which only those persons hear who keep themselves hidden. For a rooster is ashamed of nothing that he does except helping some favorite hen find a nest, and yet he is never so engaging. He will go from place to place with her, in and out of

barrels, behind woodpiles and stumps, for an hour or more without once ceasing his sweet nesting-notes, which have a music in them in no way suggested by his harsh clarion call. But the moment he catches sight of you watching, he will stop and suddenly assume a lordly air, beginning to scratch or to crow hoarsely, anything, in his endeavor to convince you that if you have seen something unusual, you must be mistaken.

Hezekiah had no such dignity to maintain before me, his long-tried intimate friend. Besides, Rebecca left him all the work to do at first. She was too timid to try; too languid, too overpowered, perhaps. She did not even know how to feed the eight children when they came — Hezekiah had to do it. There were four at first, and then before their feathers were half grown another four had arrived. He fed the

whole family. She seemed to expect it of him. She would put up her bill as she sat on her nest for the morsel that he brought, murmuring to him all the time in charming little staccato notes, gentle and cheerful as the pattering of an April rain. Rebecca is always cheerful when Hezekiah is waiting on her. The four oldest of his children, quivering with expectancy on their perches, would, when they saw him, open their mouths too, and in faltering imitation of their mother utter the same staccato notes, as they swayed from side to side, their tiny wings fluttering in excitement. And then the four smallest birds, without a feather on them, would also call to him in still fainter tones, thrusting their bald heads, all mouth and eyes, up from under their mother's wings. Hezekiah had something for each — unimpeachable gentleman as he is. All day long he was flying back

and forth, never taking a moment for a song except his good-night carol, which nothing ever made him omit. I always knew when I heard it that he was just ready to settle for the night and to tuck his little head under his yellow wing.

Of course it was a pretty sight — this father bird, yellow as some summer butterfly fluttering over a bed of thistles, although I have to confess that the beauty of the picture did not invariably appeal to me. I used to wonder at Hezekiah's cheerfulness and serenity in meeting a situation for which neither of us had been prepared. By this time there were ten birds, little and big, in the corner of my room, and more in prospect. Under Rebecca, indeed, among the four youngest birds, there were still two other eggs to be hatched. My own patience was sorely tried. I marveled at his.

It seemed to me, besides, that Re-

becca took Hezekiah's devotion too much for granted, that she was too complacent about the whole situation, as if his own duties must be such a delight to him! She found it so easy to be satisfied when he failed in nothing. I never saw her look so happy, nor her pretty face so bright; nor did she ever really seem to enjoy his rare and exquisite voice so much as when he darted into her cage with some morsel in his mouth, and she lifted her head, like a face from a pillow, to receive it, while he murmured over her as she took it from his bill; or when in low notes he called to the little ones before playing with them. For he used to play with them, pretending to fight. With bills open and wings outspread, father and children would rush back and forth before each other in sham battles. He taught them all how to fly. Naturally Rebecca was happy — the best of all

his accomplishments brought into service for her family, while she sat there knowing everything belonged to her. It required her to be less highly keyed, too, than when he had persuaded her to sing with him and she had to give up half an hour to *his* music.

If Hezekiah's duties wearied him towards the last, he never let her know it nor failed in an expression of devotion. Before June had passed, however, I began to have my doubts. His devotion had become too punctilious. This, at least, is what happened.

My rubber-tree had to be carried to the florist's, and the sofa that had stood before it was pushed nearer the mirror. Then for the first time Hezekiah, coming face to face with his own image in the glass without the confusion of intervening leaves between, saw before him a lovely yellow bird, valiant, graceful, beautiful as himself, the only

yellow bird in the room, his family being all greens and browns. For three days, every one who came to see me laughed at Hezekiah fighting the yellow bird in the mirror, whose courage equaled his own, between battles going back to feed his wife and little ones. At the end of the third day he fell in love with the bird whom he saw. I knew it, though Rebecca did not, for she was sitting on her nest, happy with her eight children around her and her prospects of more. I saw Hezekiah take bits of cotton (pulled out of Rebecca's nest, too), and going up to the mirror, call the yellow beauty to him. Rebecca, of course, thought when she heard these notes that they were for her. Sometimes she answered them. Then I used to feel sorry for Rebecca.

For days and days, until they were all sent to the bird-fancier's for the summer, in fact, Hezekiah did the same

thing. His family fed and quiet, he would take a bit of cotton, and darting to the top of the sofa, or down to the floor, he would run up and down before the mirror with the cotton in his bill, tipping his little head from side to side as he went, his tiny black eyes shining, his feathers ruffling, while in his sweetest nesting-notes he would try to beguile the yellow beauty whose mood — there was the marvel of it — exactly matched his own. Then suddenly overwhelmed with the loveliness of the bewitching presence, he would dash forward with open bill to kiss it. The movement was fatal, for the cotton dropped. Like one rudely awakened from some dream, he would discover that to touch the image was to lose it. Disappointed, he would go back to feed his wife and children. He always returned to the mirror, though, carrying a fresh bit of cotton, only to drop it

for the twentieth time when he came too near. I know, because I have had twenty of these bits of cotton brushed up in a morning.

My sympathies were all with Hezekiah during this little episode, always called to a sudden halt by that invisible yet impenetrable barrier between him and his desires. How could he tell that the loveliness of the image that lured him on was but a reflection of his own exceeding charm? Perhaps my sympathies ought to have been with Rebecca, up there on her nest in her cramped position, those stilt-like legs bent under her, her eight children about her, while her husband was below coquetting with his own image in the glass. Perhaps they were at first, but not for long. She has let the habits of maternity grow too much upon her. Nests and eggs and little birds belong to the spring, it seems to me, but she wants

them every month of the year. She is always making a nest, and has been ever since Hezekiah showed her how to build the first one. Even after she came home from the bird-fancier's in the autumn, her children grown and in homes of their own, and when she could have been singing with Hezekiah, even then she began to build again. She, who used to be afraid to go about alone, is now afraid of nothing that will lead her to a string or bit of straw. She is all around the room, flying everywhere, sampling everything with an end to it that she can pull, like a woman always fingering materials on counters, with a view to her children's clothes. She has quite destroyed the ruffles of a pair of curtains by tugging at them for threads.

Once, when the lining of her nest was taken away, she pulled every tail feather out of her four half-grown birds and lined her nest with them. I saw her

try to pull the tail feathers out of Hezekiah. Even his patience went at that. She grew an extra row of feathers along her own breast, changing her looks completely, as cats shut up in cold storage will grow extra fur for warmth. Such a thing in a bird is rarely heard of. All this devotion to the interests of her offspring might appeal more strongly to me if she were not so queer about her children when they come. She has only to catch sight of me at the door and she will utter a peculiar note, and quick as the drawing in of turtles' heads, every little bird's head will disappear under her wings. Or she will call out to them when she sees me and make them remain motionless as carved images so long as I remain visible. She behaves as if I were some old ogre coming to frighten babies in their cribs. If I catch her off her nest and speak to her, she will stand suddenly still,

absolutely motionless except for the beating of her heart, never a wink of the eye nor a twitch of a feather for ten minutes at a time. Such manners may do very well for wild birds in the forest, but in my parlor, they are unpleasant. There is never any comfort to be had with birds brought up as she trains hers. Little Miss Goosey's children were as tame as kittens. Rebecca's are all as wild as hawks, nearly dying of terror as they grow older, when any one approaches.

Hezekiah is always trying to divert her. He does his best to make her sing with him, and sometimes — between nests — he succeeds.

At these times he will stand in his cage, she in hers, as they did at their first lessons together ; his feathers will be almost smooth, not puffed up on his little golden head nor about his tiny throat, as they are when he carols or

plays the devoted to her. From his perch he will give her the key in that long-drawn-out note of a surpassing sweetness which I know so well, — a note like that from some rare old violin when a bow is drawn across it. She will catch it, and then from these two throats pitched in perfect unison, there will come for half an hour or more bird music such as I, at least, never dreamed of, — exquisite, melodious, liquid, full of reflected sunshine as a dewdrop of color. I find myself transported to another world. The corner of my room where their gilt cages hang, with the rubber-tree glistening in the sunlight, seems like some enchanted sphere, all green and gold and full of marvelous melody, and there comes to me, somehow, the feeling of one who walks the fields when "the wind hath passed" and "out of the north cometh golden splendor." All my enthusiasm goes out

to Rebecca at these moments, and I recognize that, with her marvelous gift of song equaling his own, she is a fitting mate to Hezekiah, and I understand the tie between them. Then quick as a flash the spell is broken. Her notes cease suddenly. Like a woman remembering all at once how long she has been out of the nursery, she will break off abruptly. Before Hezekiah is half done, and though he calls her again and again, and gives her the key with that wonderful note, she will thrust her head through the bars and begin pulling at my curtain for a thread.

Poor Little Miss Goosey would have died for one such opportunity to sing with him, and to be asked, too, Hezekiah not fleeing at the sound of her voice, but giving her the very key. Yet Rebecca has the gift, — there is the tragedy and the pathos of it, — the gift without the necessity of any struggle to express

it. Why should she let other things interest her more?

We talk so often as though we believed that the love of a mother for her little ones was the only love really beautiful in this world. Why not more of the love that goes before it? — that which binds husband to wife, a love in which, when it is rightly understood, the only true motherhood will be found to lie, since ideals are nourished in it and born, sometimes of the flesh and sometimes of the spirit.

At brief intervals, when Rebecca happens to have no nest and no egg and no little ones, her behavior toward me will change. When I say "Good-morning" to Hezekiah, which I have never failed to do in all these years, she, too, will peep at me, but in an agitated way, never as he answers, looking me straight in the eyes. Once I established sufficient intimacy between us to induce her

to come for pieces of darning cotton which I would put on a brass hanging-lamp for her nest. She would come and take the thread, whisking her tail feathers in delight, and going off with it in high glee, until one unhappy day she caught her toes in the cotton, twisting them in such a way that I had to cut the thread, taking her in my hand to do so. She never believed in me after that, nor came for more threads. I gave up trying, my motives were so misunderstood. There are times when I realize that even Hezekiah has begun to reflect her constant humors and suspicions. He will sing to me now only from the top of the mirror or the globe of the gas jet, but even this will agitate her so that she tries to frighten him off with a note of alarm, by darting up to the curtain rod and running hurriedly back and forth on it, switching her tail and uttering peeps of warning, like a

nervous woman always calling to some one to "look out."

She has taken my friend away from me. I do not resent this so much, for I have always counted that affection meagre which begrudges new interests to old friends. It is a certain influence which she exerts over him that I deplore: one that warps his nature, as it seems to me.

Her unceasing suspicion of me, which has only varied during eighteen months when I gave her the threads, first irritated then offended me. One day I must have said so to the bird-fancier whom I consult on every occasion. At any rate, once in the autumn, when I was in his shop, he offered me a beautiful yellow bird with a marvelous top-knot, telling me how much more worthy she was of Hezekiah, and — I listened to him.

I found her beautiful indeed. Every

movement of her body was grace. She looked straight into my eyes, too, as Hezekiah used to do, with her head tipped on one side, just as he tipped his ; no beating of the heart like Rebecca's, no gasping with open bill, no petrified attitude of alarm. I knew at once that she was Hezekiah's peer, and I determined to buy her. I had always chosen his mates before, haphazard fashion, and because he was lonely. Now I would choose wisely. Would he like her? I wondered. Then, even as I asked myself the question, I remembered the yellow bird in the mirror.

With a sudden sense of self-reproach I thought of Rebecca. What would she do? "Grieve for a few days," the bird-fancier told me, "until she gets used to being shut up with the other females in a cage." I looked toward the cage high on a shelf — there were a dozen females already in it. I seemed

to see Rebecca shut up in there, too, waiting to be sold again; no sunny windows, no rubber-tree, no Hezekiah; only shrieking parrots about and barking dogs and senseless goldfish. No — Rebecca might not like me, but I would not condemn her to such a purgatory, nor break her heart with my theories of peers and fitting mates and sympathies in common. I turned abruptly and told the man I would not buy his bird.

The bird-fancier, however, was not of my mind. He likes Hezekiah. For three months during the autumn he kept the beautiful yellow bird for me, coming to tell me from time to time of people who had tried to buy her and of how he was keeping her for me. I began to feel that I was interfering with his business, and for a mere quixotic whim, since many people took pains to assure me that Hezekiah and Rebecca

were after all only birds. So I bought the new yellow topknot.

But I was ashamed.

I pictured to myself Hezekiah's quick recognition and Rebecca's grief — her dying of neglect — too shy and too timid to declare herself.

I never remember such a feeling of self-reproach as that which was mine when the beautiful yellow stranger arrived and Rebecca first saw her. Rebecca was on a nest, of course, and in December, too. Nobody else but Rebecca would ever have been on a nest in December. She looked for a moment at that yellow bird, whose gay and careless topknot fell half-way over a pair of charming black eyes. Then she rose suddenly off her nest and stood there, feathers flattened, staring at the stranger. She grew suddenly so ugly and so brown and so thin, so unlike the cheerful topknot before her, tipping a

head at her and flashing a pair of shining eyes, that for a moment all my tenderness and loyalty went out to Rebecca. It was only for a moment. The next, I had to save the yellow topknot's life. Rebecca would have had her torn to pieces, had I not interfered. The yellow topknot was too surprised to move. She did not know there were any husbands about!

Hezekiah had taken no notice of her, but he must have seen the battle from his seat up by the plaster singing boy, for after it was over he went down and chirruped to Rebecca, taking a stand by her nest in the cage.

The yellow topknot was left to amuse herself. She did not find it difficult. Everything interested her; the pattern of the Cashmere rug, the flowers in the vases, the fireplace, the rubber-tree, and then the wonder of getting in and out of her cage. She had never done that

before. She was so pretty, too, as she went about in her fearless way, stopping to cock her head with its gay plumage sideways whenever she saw any new thing. I loved her. So far as I could see, she did not even exist for Hezekiah. He was more devoted than ever to Rebecca, and I laughed to myself when I watched them all : the gay little topknot left to herself, and Hezekiah all fidelity at his post by Rebecca's nest. I might have spared myself, I thought, my little heroics about them, my small philosophies born like so many creeds out of a limited experience, lacking in depth what they boasted in intensity. Hezekiah loved Rebecca and that was the end of it — as it always is when the father-bird is content. There are never any social problems or temptations then for him.

Rebecca was the only one disturbed. She never sat quite flat on her eggs —

indeed, those particular eggs never hatched at all. Her head was always up, like a head thrust over the banisters, while she peered over the top of her nest to see what the yellow topknot was about and to assure herself of what Hezekiah was doing. Sometimes I would lock the yellow topknot in, and then Rebecca would go over to her cage and pick at her through the bars, or worse still, she would sit on the top of the yellow bird's cage with head lowered and eyes fixed on the graceful stranger below her. I have seen her there for half an hour at a time, crouching without moving, like a cat before a mouse-hole. I never could understand how she managed to get so flat with those long and awkward legs of hers, nor how she managed to keep so still. Nothing else, not even all Hezekiah's blandishments, had taken her off a nest before.

When, on the other hand, Rebecca was locked in, and the yellow topknot came anywhere near her cage, Rebecca was off her nest like a flash and dashing against the bars, or running up and down her perch with wings outspread, mouth open, uttering hideous notes — and all this, too, when Hezekiah had made not the slightest advance towards the stranger. I could hardly believe it to be the timid and languid Rebecca, who had been afraid of everything; but I thought it was funny, and I used to let the yellow topknot out near Rebecca's cage to show different people what she would do. The programme was never altered.

Rebecca would be on her nest, quiet and placid, Hezekiah on his perch below her, hunched up and uncomfortable, but — alone (she always had to be sure of that). Then I would drive the yellow topknot towards Rebecca's cage,

and Rebecca, with a fierce cry, would fly off her nest and dash herself against the bars in an agony to be free and at her enemy. There was no timid Rebecca any more, but an angry, awful fury bent on destruction. I used to think it was funny, as I said, until some old lady, seeing one day what Rebecca did, told me that it was "not funny, but *sad*." No man had thought so. Every man had laughed, head thrown back. Some young girl had said that Rebecca had a "temper."

By and by, out of sheer pity for her nerves, I covered her cage so that she could not see the yellow topknot any more. Hezekiah did everything that any bird could do for his wife, never swerving in his devotion to her.

As the weeks went by and the yellow topknot became a familiar object in the room, he would, to be sure, sing out a note of welcome now and then to the

pretty creature as she moved about, just as he had always done to me — nothing more than a "How do you do?" or, "The day is fine," or at most, "It is good to see some one moving." Even these civilities Rebecca would not stand. It was astonishing the energy this languid creature displayed. Her head was eternally over the edge of her nest, her eyes alert and peering everywhere. Hezekiah must sit still, too, if she was to stay on her nest. She minds nothing if he is uncomfortable too.

There are times when I think that I have really never known what Hezekiah wants, nor that for all my long intimacy and devotion I understand him yet. I only know this: The yellow topknot who, with her grace and sweetness, had won a way into every heart but that of Rebecca, began, when February came, to pull strings out from the curtain for herself. Nobody helped

her. She had only seen Rebecca do it. She imitated Rebecca's nesting-notes, too, and now and then going up to Hezekiah, she would hold up her open bill, begging to be kissed, just as poor Little Miss Goosey had done, and with as scant return. Should I have blamed her? Every one loves Hezekiah, a very prince among canaries. This little bird's topknot might give her a gay and careless air, but she knew that she could build nests as well as the green-brown Rebecca, and if that were the way to Hezekiah's heart, she would build them.

Once when he had seen her tugging hard at a thread (helplessness always appealed to him), I saw Hezekiah bring the yellow topknot a piece of cotton in his bill, just as he had carried one to the yellow bird in the mirror.

Then he flew quickly back to his own

cage and took up his post beside Rebecca.

That afternoon I carried the topknot away and gave her to the expressman's wife across the street. I did not want any lonely nest-building for the fearless yellow beauty whom I loved, Rebecca up there on her nest claiming everything.

Hezekiah cocked his little feathery ears for days after the topknot went, and I called her name to test him, until I was afraid to say it any more.

During the days that followed, I noticed that although he was as attentive as ever to Rebecca, he began to do something he had never done before in all the other years — to sit on the sash of the eastern window and sing.

It is the window that looks down into that of the expressman's wife, where the cage of the yellow topknot is hanging.

III

THERE are some of us, it would seem, who need great crises to teach us palpable truths. Thus we accept as a generally approved proposition the declaration of a one universal life breathing through us all. But when we are called upon to demonstrate our faith by practice, we are shocked to discover that in spite of catholic creeds we have gone on regulating our conduct by a faith in dividing lines, as though the divergent paths by which we had traveled had been sanctioned by a divine ordinance, separating eternally the higher orders from the lower, and always the less favored from ourselves. It is only when a common dan-

ger arises, or there is a common end to be attained, that we are forced to recognize the fact that, with the humblest of creation, we constitute but a single body after all, every part of which is bound, each to the other, by myriads of interdependent necessities — the greatest among us bound to the least and the least among us to the greatest.

But what did I know of the need of my learning these palpable truths as I listened to Hezekiah singing in the sunshine of his corner? What, indeed, did I dream of all the things which have been taught me since as I watched him, blithe and always beautiful, now flitting with inimitable grace into the cage of the nesting Rebecca in order to enliven her long vigils with some note of a cheerful devotion ; now sitting on the sash of the eastern window pouring his heart out in song as he looked down toward the window of the expressman's

wife where the yellow topknot's cage was hung; and now when I spoke, and Rebecca could not see (he knew just what things would disturb his nervous wife), darting to the frame of a particular picture where, lowering his head and lifting his wings, his bright eyes shining straight down into mine, he could entertain me, his old friend, as I stood praising him, with one of his choicest melodies; proving in every gracious act, and for the hundredth time, his knowledge of what the obligations of the princely were, and how they should be balanced among each of us, so that each should feel her own importance! What was there anywhere, I say, in the seclusion of the days which we lived together, to suggest that the lines of my canary's destiny were in any way interwoven with questions relating to municipal affairs, to acts of legislatures, to contracts and subways,

and all the rest of those direful things which have gone to make the lives of New Yorkers wretched until the blessings of a Rapid Transit can be attained ?

Yet the subway proved that Hezekiah's destiny, for all the love with which I had protected him, lay along no isolated lines, but that in strange and inexplicable ways it was governed by the necessities of people and of creatures, of whom, as he sang, neither of us dreamed.

For many months during the winter I had watched the excavations in the street creep up towards my corner, but with only so much of a general interest as we all feel in public improvements involving directly no real estate values of our own. The huge derricks anchored by granite paving-blocks, and meant for lifting the dirt and broken stones from the subway, had just been

erected under my windows, and the blasting begun, when my story of Hezekiah's third wife was finished. All day long and half the night I could see the boom of that derrick rise and fall slowly before my window-panes, like an ugly finger lifted in warning, startling me sometimes when I glanced up suddenly from a book.

This was in May, nearly two years after Rebecca's arrival.

My rubber-tree by that time had again been sent to the florist for the summer, but some one had given me to take its place a branch of pink and white apple blossoms, — a branch so large that from the green vase which held it, on the floor, it reached the ceiling, and like the leaves of the rubber-tree, could touch the panes on either side.

Hezekiah, when he saw it, fell into the wildest ecstasy of delight. Its perfume, its color, the breath of the wide

orchard which it carried intoxicated him almost to the point of delirium. He flew from twig to twig, poked his tiny bill among the blossoms, and swelling his wonderful throat, again and again burst into rhapsodies of song. Even Rebecca came off her nest so often to drink in the perfume that I began to be worried about her eggs, and the small baby-bird, as yet unnamed, that belonged to Rebecca's April nest (she being already engaged with some other eggs, he was now left to look after himself), was so happy that though less than five weeks old he began to sing. It was like the liquid warble of a wood bird, heard in pianissimo, while he sat alone, perched among the blossoms in the sunshine, his face turned toward the sky.

He was so young (none of Hezekiah's twelve children had ever begun to sing at that age), and he sang so quietly, and like all gifted singers with

so little effort or movement, that at first I always had to look, to convince myself that it was he. There was something almost of magic and of mystery about it all, this hardly more than a baby-bird singing as he did, as if indeed he had come into the world preordained to eminence. It was as though the breath of the out-of-doors which the blossoms carried, the breath of the spring itself, had quickened into form memories of primeval things. For the very spirit of virginal forests was embodied in his song, of musical streams, of deep pools and cool green mosses, of tall trees that were swayed by the wind and stretched upward to the sky, of all the things that poets and singers know without seeing, and which the rest of us see without knowing,—things which some far-away ancestor of his, living a life of freedom in the woods, had seen and heard, bequeathing the tradition of them as a

dream to those who, coming after, were to sing of them only during days of a hopeless captivity. Like Hezekiah, this little bird sang in ravishing notes, liquid as dewdrops, but the ineffable sweetness of his mother's tones was in them too.

And with the songs of these birds, the beauty of the apple-blossoms, and the radiance of a sunshine that poured in at the windows out of blue and cloudless skies, there fell upon that corner of my room a great and amazing glory, of which, now that all is still again, I too would dream. Hezekiah, yellow as some daffodil, as he darted from spray to spray, seemed like another blossom himself, blown by the wind. Even the green-brown Rebecca, when she came off her nest, lent herself to the picture, the color of her feathers toning in with that of the leaves and stems; while the yellow on the breast of the little bird

repeated Hezekiah's color, the green-brown of his wings taking up the tones of Rebecca's feathers. We all sat entranced, giving ourselves up to the marvel of it. Some of my friends, when I was not at home, came in to spend an hour or more in silent enjoyment of the picture. It was as if I commanded some famous view which travelers begged permission to see.

Rebecca had another nest of course, — nests were her pastime. She had built one on top of the mirror behind the highest apple-blossoms, and tucked well away under the elbow of the plaster singing boy. She had pulled all the ferns out of my vases and piled them in front of her, so that I could never see more of her through her barricade of green than one shining eye peering down at me. I would never have seen even that, had I not known Rebecca and just where to look. In this nest she

had laid a single egg, and then for some reason she had deserted it and gone to the gilt cage with its wire nest lined with cotton. In this she had laid four eggs. I found them all afterward.

All this, as I said, was in May.

On the third Wednesday of the month I sent the story of Hezekiah's third wife away, and I refer to the fact just here, merely because of the opportunity which it affords me to explain that had I known what was going to happen, or had I chanced to wait until the catastrophe came, I should never have written about Rebecca as I did. One gets an uncomfortable sense from remembering that one has exposed the foibles even of birds that are gone. It is like whispering in the presence of the deaf. The advantage is a mean one. Moreover, with the ending of that story I meant to close all my chronicles. In fact, I thought that there would never

be anything more to tell, since I had determined to make no more history for my birds with any of my ill-advised attentions.

Friday came, however, and a power beyond my control made history for them.

It happened that I was up later than usual that night, and it was half past eleven before I put out my lamp. I had gone to Hezekiah's cage to see that everything was right. I never went to bed without doing that. He was asleep beside Rebecca — she on her nest and he on the edge of it, puffed up like a yellow ball, his left foot drawn up under one wing, his head hidden under the other. Outside, on top of the cage, the little baby-bird was fast asleep. The cage door was open. Nothing could have been more peaceful.

I went out and shut the parlor door, a custom only established since the

arrival of the baby-bird, who, a born adventurer, flew everywhere, essaying journeys into other rooms which his mother would have perished in attempting.

At seven o'clock on Saturday morning I went into the parlor again and called Hezekiah.

I have dreaded from the beginning the telling of this part of my story, and I have lingered over every sweet recollection of the days that came before, not only because of the sweetness of those days themselves, but because the longer I loitered over them, the longer I could defer the need of relating what followed upon the opening of my parlor door. For there came upon me then the horror of that moment, when silence for the first time falls between those who have been dear to one another, and a name that has always brought flashing back at you a gladdening response

now only conjures up an unconquerable presence to brood between you and the thing which you have loved.

Such a silence, portentous in its mystery, hideous in its suggestiveness, quickening some senses abnormally and deadening others, grew upon the room when I called Hezekiah's name again. He who had always flown up from a hiding-place when he heard me come in, or answered me from some corner with a low sweet note (never for any one but me), was now still. From where I stood I looked about and called again. No answer came. I waited. No one of the three birds was to be seen. Even Rebecca was not on her nest. I knew that because her tail was always visible above the rim though her head might be hidden. Suddenly, without reason or any attempt at a farther investigation, I, who had always been so solicitous when I thought anything

the matter with Hezekiah, now sat down by the door, wondering to myself, as I looked toward the empty cages, why I took it so calmly. Yet what 'it' meant, I did not seem in my bewilderment to know.

Outside my window that huge warning finger of a derrick-boom moved slowly up and down, its highest joint set off by a red Japanese paper fan, put there by a light-hearted laborer in mock derision of the misery of the excavations below.

Let any one explain the mystery to me who can. The solution of it is beyond me. I only know this, that as I sat there impassively by my parlor door, watching that hideous finger of a derrick-boom rise and fall before my window-panes, afraid to look on the floor of the empty cages, harassed by the silence which still grew upon the room, oppressed beyond words by the quiet, I

said to myself, "A rat has come in out of the subway and killed Hezekiah." I do not know why I said it, nor whether I quite understood what I was saying to myself. Certainly I had never before thought of rats attacking birds, nor had I ever seen one on the premises.

I had given unconsciously the explanation. The bird-fancier who came at my urgent call said so at once, adding that the rat was young. The blasting and the digging in the subway had scattered in every direction those living under the pavement and in the sewers. In the cellars across the street whole families were to be found, I was told, of young and old, sometimes nests of little ones born overnight. One rat, half grown, had in a moment of danger run into my doorway and up the stairs, his mother perhaps promising to follow when the crisis was over. But the

mother never came and he took refuge under one of my bookcases, as I afterwards discovered, crawling at night up the burlaps of my walls, over my curtains, and then through the open door into Hezekiah's cage. Mice were always doing this, but Hezekiah never waked for them, knowing that they only wanted seeds and water. Trifles like those never disturbed him.

Hezekiah and Rebecca were both dead, lying side by side on the bottom of the cage, the four eggs undisturbed in the nest above them. The little baby-bird, having been on the outside, had flown off to a silver cathedral lamp hanging from the ceiling and so escaped.

We solace ourselves with strange crumbs of comfort when sorrow attacks us. Remembering as I did all that the yellow topknot across the street had meant to Hezekiah, and how I too had

wanted her as his companion, I found my consolation in the fact that he had died by Rebecca's side. His yellow feathers filled the cage, and his must have been the fiercest struggle. His little body showed the signs. I like to remember that he who swerved in no duty while living died without dishonor at the last. Had he left it to me in the coming days to explain his escape and Rebecca's destruction, I could have found nothing in the blithest of his songs worth the need of an apology for him.

It was not until that afternoon that the rat was caught. Then the bird-fancier (he has always been Hezekiah's friend) brought a ferret to do the work. I think that he was governed by a certain sense of the fitness of things in choosing, as he did, this one invincible enemy of the rat-race, to kill the slayer of my birds. No trap would have done,

no cat. Great forces had been in conflict, and great avenging elements must be called upon.

When the work was done, a man I know opened the window and, taking the dead rat by the tail, tossed it back into the open subway, for by that time several sympathizing men and women had gathered about me. The catastrophe in my parlor seemed to them no ordinary one — an enemy out of the dark, some vermin of the gutters, coming in to strike down one whose whole life had been but a radiation of sunshine and of charm. It is the way of vermin bred in towns to do these things. Like assassins, they aim only at that which represents the higher, as Hezekiah did; at those the benediction of whose beauty they can never comprehend, and whose excellence they can only approach when they come with murderous weapons to destroy. They

would dash their daggers at the stars if they could, as evil thwarted always strikes instinctively at righteousness.

These things were in our minds as we saw the dead rat tossed away. It seemed proper to us at the time that he should die in ignominy. Yet he too, had we known, might have been a person on his own account. A certain kind of courage was unquestionably his. He had lived according to the laws which govern his own kind, and broken none of ours until man had interfered with his habits underground and driven him out of his appointed sphere.

But his death and the dishonor that attended him at the last! What did they avail? Nothing would ever bring my beautiful bird back to me. The fruits of vengeance are but thorns in the flesh, after all.

I laid the bodies of Hezekiah and

Rebecca side by side, and when Monday came I put them in a white envelope and carried them to the florist who in summer takes care of the rubber-tree. I meant to bury them under it. Poor Little Miss Goosey, I thought too, would, if she knew, be happy at last with Hezekiah beside her, even if the other one were there. But the march of public improvements still bound Hezekiah's fate to one involving wider issues. The florist's shop was being pulled down to make room for a larger establishment, and he had moved to Fifth Avenue until the work was done. In the new shop I learned that with scores of others my rubber-tree had been sent to the country, so that under its branches there could be no last resting-place for Hezekiah.

I turned aimlessly away and walked down the avenue, not knowing where to find a grave for my birds.

The day was so bright and so beautiful. A light wind flapped the flags overhead sometimes straight against an azure sky. No cloud was visible. Hezekiah, I thought, should have been singing on such a day, reveling in the sunshine to which he bore such close affinity. Instead, he lay dead, here in my hand, while I, though I loved him, had no place in that great wilderness of a town in which to lay him and keep his grave undefiled. In the real wilderness where he should have lived his days, there would have been a place for death as well as life, since there death is but a transition; but in man's great wilderness of brown-stone and brick, death is only a menace and destruction, and we are forced to rid ourselves of all evidences of it, quickly, as we would destroy the garments of infected patients, until it grows to be a hideous thing.

Every one whom I passed in the sunshine of that May morning seemed so happy — all smiles and cordial bows and pretty spring bonnets — while I with my little dead birds in my hand walked on. No one knew what I carried in that small white envelope. It might have been a letter or a bill, for all they knew, and I found myself wondering, as I looked into the faces of that well-dressed, moving throng, who else was there who carried a secret too, as sad as mine, without a play of the features to betray her. The world's conventionalities demand these things of us. One might, if one willed, sit by a country roadside and weep. Whatever the care, one must move with the procession in a town or lay one's self open to dubious question.

I turned in at a friend's house by and by, but her plot of a city backyard was only rented, and had its cats too.

She offered me a grave in her country place, however, and with her own hands tied up the box in which I expressed my birds to their last resting-place.

One day in July I went to see where they had placed Hezekiah. I found his grave by that of Rebecca in a bed of tall white hydrangeas, so that even in death he and Rebecca lie side by side, while poor little Miss Goosey lies far away alone under their rubber-tree, — poor Little Miss Goosey indeed, whose love for him was greater than all our own. The man of the house had put a head and foot stone over Rebecca, and over Hezekiah a snow-white shaft, and on it this simple inscription: —

HEZEKIAH AND REBECCA.

May, 1901.

I laid a blossom on the stone with a tenderness I had not felt about graves

before. Other friends, men and women whom I have loved, have never seemed to me to lie in the earth that covered them. With the freeing of their spirits they have often become more real to me than when bodily conditions held them down. It has always been as though the soul, now untrammeled, had begun another stage of its long journey, leaving behind it that which it could no longer use nor carry.

With Hezekiah it was different. What journey had he before him? — he who belonged so to the sunshine of this world that he seemed in fact of its very essence; he who was not a soul sent here for discipline, as we mortals are, not sent here to learn, nor to be perfected by the struggle, but, with a gift already perfect, sent here to gladden, to brighten, and to charm. What was there in Hezekiah indeed which death could free? His song and he

were one, and to me it was as though everything of him had been laid away with his little feathery body in the ground. I was only glad as I looked at the snow-white shaft which marked his grave among the tall hydrangeas, that the man of the house had seen that no dishonor attended his last obsequies.

Yet now, and even as I write of him as gone, something of Hezekiah that will not die is all at once with me as if to disapprove my doubts of his affection. He no longer seems to lie there where they made his grave among the blossoms. Like all the others he has come back to me, and I can see him again, as I knew him in the old days, his bright black eyes shining straight into mine with a joyous constancy that death itself cannot shake, his little feathery ears cocking in glad excitement at my speech. Even the pretty face

of the languid Rebecca comes back, just as it used to appear when she saw Hezekiah taking any notice of me, but now with a certain pathos in it as if to claim an indulgence I was loath to render her. So at last, as I see him before me, I know that those of our dead are twice buried, indeed, about whose memories we preserve unbroken silences when they are gone. Love that re-creates an image that has vanished restores it, and the resurrection of its spirit follows to remain.

To the little baby-bird whom Hezekiah had left, the day of his father's death had, until the rat was caught, been one of a surprising sadness and a gloom. None of us had been happy, and we had all been afraid. A household like mine does not readily adapt itself to the thought of a live rat remaining at large in a parlor. We had

hardly dared venture over the threshold, the more shame ours, and so we had left the little bird alone.

Outside in the street all that day, the noise of the digging and the blasting went on, but inside that room silence was everywhere. There were no bird songs any more. The gilt cages were empty. The blossoms on the apple-bough, falling rapidly as they will when once they begin to go, had suddenly left the branches "bare ruined choirs" which he shunned. He would not sing. Not for all his hunger would he go near the cage in which Hezekiah and his mother had perished. I had to put food for him somewhere else, when indeed I summoned courage enough to go into the room at all. Then I always found him, the very type and emblem of abandoned babyhood, avoiding even the sunshine to conceal himself behind the silver wing of a small cherub on a

proaches were now regarded but as signals for further alarm. This plunged me into despair.

Then suddenly like an inspiration there came to me the thought of the yellow topknot across the street.

Could there be another bird, I asked myself as I made ready to go for her, so equipped in every way as this one was for such a crisis? She would be sure to divert him, baby-bird as he was, by her unflagging interest in outside things, as a crying infant is diverted by a nurse who taps upon the window-pane, pretending to be absorbed in untold wonders in a garden or a street. For the yellow topknot was invariably interested in something. This made one of her charms. She was always ready to enjoy, to be pleased and entertained. Her readiness to enjoy was so captivating, so alluring, as such readiness must be when pos-

sessed by a person distinguished like her for rare beauty and grace, and for that indefinable quality which the rest of us call magnetism. She had fascinated us all on her first arrival by the way in which she lent herself to every pleasure we provided. To me it had been like the most subtle form of flattery, since each new object that she saw in my parlor, old and familiar as each was to me, had seemed to her only just so much more entrancing than that which she had seen but a moment before. We had all found her irresistible, as she went about in her beauty among the pictures and the books and on her journey of discovery over the patterns in my cashmere rug, examining every object, now with one charming black eye tipped delightedly toward it, now with the other, her lovely yellow plumage falling on either side of her head as she moved it. Her very presence had

been a refreshment, and we had never done missing her.

Then how indifferent she had been to every situation involving any question of jeopardy to herself, proving her courage a hundred times during Rebecca's repeated assaults, and this too when her very life had been imperiled. Such fearlessness I felt convinced would be sure to inspire the baby-bird. Happily, too, she knew my house and would have no sense of strangeness to overcome. It seemed more and more providential to me that she should be so near. As I thought of her again, and of all that my house had meant to her, there flashed into my mind a vague feeling of wonder at the inscrutable ordering of finite concerns, now that the child of Rebecca was to be given into the custody of the yellow topknot,— the child of the bird who, when living, would so gladly have an-

nihilated this same yellow topknot if she could.

When all my sympathizing friends had gone, therefore, I went to the expressman's wife across the street, and taking the cage of the yellow topknot from among those of the other birds, I carried her home myself. Then I opened the cage door, expecting her to fly out at once as she had done before.

The yellow topknot, now known as Kate by every truckman up and down the block, refused to move, however. She did what I had never seen any bird do before, — sat like a carven image on her perch, except that she turned her head slowly now and then to look over her left wing, like a frightened person half afraid to know, yet more afraid not to discover what might be lurking behind her. Her mouth was held open in fright for the first time

in her life, and her lovely plumage, which had given her so rakish an air, now lay close pressed to her head, as the feathers of birds are always flattened in fright. I would have laughed at her, had I been in the humor for laughing, for my bright and fearless beauty had all the air of a playful child whose curls have been wet and plastered flat by some guardian of reformatory moods.

Nothing would induce her to leave her cage. Although the little bird, overjoyed at her coming, made repeated advances to her, she declined to reply. All she did was to turn her head slowly over her wing, as she had begun by doing, to look in agonized fright behind her.

His joy was pitiful. His efforts to attract her attention filled me with inexpressible sadness. He would not, to be sure, venture into her cage, knowing

as he did what sometimes happened to birds who are caught inside of cages, but he would perch on the outside of hers (an old trick of his mother's) and, pressing his little face close to the bars, or thrusting his bill through them, he would chirp to her and call, and then, still calling, fly off to the apple-bough, to the sill of a window, to a picture frame, and always to her cage again, like a child made suddenly happy, going back and forth among his playthings to entertain a visitor. Nothing moved Kate. It was as though, with that strange power possessed by animals and lost by us, she had divined something of the horror of the night before. I could not tell whether it was of the dead Hezekiah that she thought, or whether it was the horror only of a nameless something that afflicted her; or whether she who had been so fearless before was now fearful for herself,

not knowing whether all carnage were yet over. I only know that she sat absolutely motionless except for that strained, slow movement of the head.

My disappointment in her took on the nature of a blow. It was as though some family friend had failed me in a dilemma.

The little baby-bird was too young to understand. He was only happy, now that something warm and breathing like himself had come into the silent room, I unhappily having not counted with him. All semblance of his fear had disappeared, and in his attentions to the obdurate Kate he became as joyous and abandoned in his manner as his father had been in his devotion to Rebecca. His was the privilege of the young, perhaps, and he could forget, while I being human could only remember. I blamed myself for not being glad that he was

glad, and then I realized that for everything that he, a baby-bird knew, fathers and mothers might all die as his had done and yellow topknots come to take their places. For had not every stage of his development, I asked myself, been marked by shocks until they seemed to be a part of a general and necessary order of growing? Had he not been tumbled out of his nest as all cage-born birds are tumbled, made to learn with his first fall just what his rightful place in the world should be, as a creature possessing, by divine right, wings with which to rise?

Had he not been driven out of babyhood and into childhood with a shock still more severe, that one which he received with his mother's first repulse? I myself had witnessed it. With wings quivering and bill open, chirping joyfully as he moved, he had gone up to his mother to be fed as she had gloried

in his doing, so that she herself might fill his mouth with tit-bits as he stood before her swaying from side to side in his excitement. This time, alas! instead of some morsel which she had prepared, she being already absorbed in another nest, he had received only a stab from her beak, — a stab that had sent him staggering into bewildered independence of her.

Finally, there had come the tragedy of the dreadful night, followed by the presence of the yellow stranger. What could they mean except another stage in his development, and the need of his learning, as his father had learned before him, how to care for the helpless and the weak? For Kate had lost all her courage, even her charm. Instead of her looking after the baby-bird, he looked after her. More and more as he waited upon her, or flew about in graceful ministrations, he grew to

seem like him. That long and slender body of his was Hezekiah's. I saw the likeness, too, in his manner, in that air of a ceaseless concern with the needs and the pleasures of the timid and the frail. Nothing of it all touched Kate, however: nothing of his sweetness and his gentleness; nothing of his constant thought of her, nothing of his tireless attentions nor yet of his joy in her presence. She accepted his attentions as though they were her due. Perhaps she thought they were.

It may be that she resented having been called upon to care for Rebecca's child now that Hezekiah was no longer about; that she felt the injustice of her being made to render one more tribute to her rival; of her being asked to make still another sacrifice of herself for a bird who when living had had all of her heart's desire, and who in dying still missed nothing of it. Looked at

from Kate's point of view, it was taking a mean advantage of her. The care of the child could have been but a meagre consolation at best, Hezekiah having been the bird that he was, a prince among canaries, of whose society she had been deprived just as she had known his charms. Perhaps, though, she only missed his joyous presence, as we all did, the silence of the branches where so lately he had been singing afflicting her as it afflicted us. The place was desolate without him.

She took no notice of me, although whenever I had gone to the office of the expressman's wife, as was my frequent habit, Kate had always answered my call from her perch, tipping her head with its lovely plumage at me as she looked down into my face, till I had supposed myself the very dearest of her friends. Now she seemed to dislike me, and she continued to be so

wretched, so unlike herself, that after a day or two more in which I hoped vainly that matters would mend, I had to send her back to the expressman's wife, the little bird, now caged, going with her too, beating his baby wings wildly against the bars. There were other birds there who would know better how to comfort him.

If Kate had been contented as in the old days among the books and pictures of my parlor, all might have been well, but it was easy for us all to see that she had grown to prefer the society across the street to which my banishment had accustomed her. She liked what she found there in the small office: the coming and going of many men, the opening and the shutting of the door, the whistling of the truckmen, their familiar salutations to her, and the companionship of the other birds who had been brought up without

theories. Then, too, she liked the sunny-tempered wife of the express-man. I could not blame her.

Because she was unhappy in my parlor, what had I, indeed, to say? I had only interfered with her predilections ever since her great beauty had first attracted me to her in the bird-fancier's shop, and I had yielded to his importunities and bought her, thinking her the only fitting mate for Hezekiah. How do I know, indeed, that she was not his mate, remembering as I do what the image of the yellow beauty in the mirror had meant to him, and how much more it had meant when the apple-blossoms came with the breath of the real spring which they carried? How do I know, either, that Rebecca was his mate? I can never forget that Rebecca, in spite of the marvel of her perfect voice, always preferred every other duty in life to the bother of sing-

ing one of his own songs with him, even when Hezekiah begged it.

Yet I had only considered Rebecca, never Kate.

I had thrown her in Hezekiah's way, and then when she had learned to love him as we all did (and when was she ever so sweet?), I had sent her away, establishing her elsewhere and thinking to give her a life of her own, as if there could have been any other life possible for her who had once known Hezekiah. Last of all, when she had adapted herself to her new conditions, I had brought her back to the scene of a tragedy which had robbed her forever of all chance to be with him.

Suppose that I had given her his child to take care of! What could any child be compared to him, — a prince?

Why, indeed, should the pretty yellow topknot have liked me or wanted to stay? If she astonished me as she

had done by failing me in a crisis, why should I have sat in judgment upon her? Had I ever given her any chance to be herself?

No! Although I have justified myself at every step by idle sophistries, I have only been cruel to Kate, and I owe her what the strong always owe the weak whom they have defrauded. Yet can I ever, for all my regret, for all that I mean to do for her hereafter, — can I ever pay my debt to her, and will the purity of primal instincts ever be hers again?

Would I have been kinder to Kate, I often ask myself, had she not loved Hezekiah so well?

Some of us find it so hard at times to forgive the most beautiful thing in the world.

The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.